



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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19 August 2008

**EGY102911.E**

Egypt: Recruitment by Islamic militant groups, including methods and incidence  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Detailed information on the incidence of recruitment and methods used by Islamic militant groups in Egypt was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. In a spring 2007 review of a book on Muslim extremism in Egypt, the *Middle East Quarterly* notes that "little remains known about the inner-workings and precise recruitment mechanisms of [Egyptian] Islamist groups."

A 17 February 2008 article appearing in *The New York Times* notes that with the recent normalization of conservative religiosity among young Egyptians, "[t]here is simply a larger pool to recruit from and a shorter distance to go, especially when coupled with widespread hopelessness."

According to a report published in the *Middle East Review of International Affairs* (MERIA), the economic crisis that characterized the 1970s led to the spread of Islamic societies providing social welfare and private mosques, where militants were free to meet with recruits (Sept. 1999). Middle East scholar Gilles Kepel, author of a book entitled *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and the Pharaoh*, adds that the "marginalized 20-25-year-olds on the outskirts of big cities" who were historically the most vulnerable to recruitment by militant groups, may also have had some tendencies toward violence as many hailed from towns in central and southern Egypt "known for their illicit arms trade" (*Middle East Quarterly* Spring 2007).

### Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood is an Islamist organization created in 1928 with the goal of promoting a state run according to Muslim law (USIP July 2002), but outlawed by the Egyptian government since 1954 (AP 6 Feb. 2007). According to *The Times*, professionals such as doctors, engineers and geologists occupy many of the leadership positions within the organization (4 July 2007).

The Cairo-based newspaper *Al-Ahram Weekly* reports that, due to its illegality, the Muslim Brotherhood recruits "in secret," and in 1992 estimates of its membership ranged from 100,000 to 500,000 members; security services were unable to provide a more precise figure (7-13 July 2005).

On numerous occasions, Egyptian authorities have prosecuted members of the Muslim Brotherhood for soliciting new recruits (AP 6 Feb. 2007; HRW 2003). For instance, in July 2002, a military court sentenced sixteen members of the Muslim Brotherhood to three to five years' imprisonment for their role in the recruitment of new members (ibid.). In December 2006, Egyptian police arrested 140 members of the Muslim Brotherhood for "recruiting students and providing them with combat training" (AP 6 Feb. 2007). By August 2007, *The New York Sun* reported that due to a succession of recent arrests against party members, the Muslim Brotherhood had "abandoned efforts to win liberalization of Egyptian law and gain the right to openly recruit, meet and run for political office" (15 Aug. 2007).

A number of Islamic militant groups in Egypt were splinter groups that emerged from and were greatly influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood, including: al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (The Islamic Group), al-Najuna min al-Nar (Those Who Are Saved from Hell), al-Takfir wal-Hijra (Unbelief and Emigration), Egyptian Islamic Jihad and Tanzim al-Fanniyya al-Askariyya (The Military Technical Organization) (USIP July 2002). Since November 2006, the Canadian Government has listed al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (AGAI), the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), as well as the latter's armed wing the Vanguard of Conquest (VOC) (Canada 9 Nov. 2006) as groups associated with "terrorism" (ibid. 18 Sept. 2007).

### Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (AGAI)

Also known as al-Gama'at, Egyptian al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya, Islamic Gama'at, the Islamic Group (US 30 Apr. 2008, Ch. 6) or Jamaat al-Islamiyya (CFR 30 May 2008b), AGAI is considered Egypt's largest militant group (US 30 Apr. 2008, Ch. 6). According to the United States Department of State's *Country Reports on Terrorism*, AGAI operates primarily in the southern Egyptian governorates of Al-Minya, Asyut, Qina and Sohaj, but it also has

networks in Cairo, Alexandria as well as in other cities, "particularly among unemployed graduates and students" (ibid.; CFR 30 May 2008b).

*Al-Ahram Weekly* notes that in the 1970s and 1980s, AGAI - like the EIJ - "mounted intensive recruitment drives, incorporating thousands of disaffected youths into their tightly guarded and controlled organisational structures" (28 Feb.-5 Mar. 2008). *Al-Ahram Weekly* describes both AGAI and EIJ as organizations that

had highly centralized hierarchies with ranks of mid-level officers to convey orders to bases spread throughout all Egyptian cities and governorates. Recruits were ideologically indoctrinated and trained to engage in armed confrontation with the "enemy": government officials, security agencies, Copts, secularists and ordinary people who happened to fall in the crossfire of their violence. (28 Feb.-5 Mar. 2008)

According to *Country Reports on Terrorism*, AGAI "probably commanded several thousand hardcore members and a like number of supporters" at its height, but following state security measures, the group had become dormant by 2007 (US 30 Apr. 2008, Ch. 6; CFR 30 May 2008b). In addition, AGAI has reportedly renounced violence as a means of achieving its political objectives since the late 1990s (Al Arabiya 9 Dec. 2007; see also International Crisis Group 18 June 2008, 11).

### **Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ)**

Alternatively known as Egyptian al-Jihad, Jihad Group or New Jihad (US 30 Apr. 2008, Ch. 6), the EIJ emerged in the 1970s and depended primarily on family and social networks in their recruitment programs, with particular focus on attracting students from lower socio-economic strata who were new to big city life (MERIA Sept. 1999), especially Cairo (*Encyclopedia of Islam* 2004, 365). At the same time, the *Middle East Review of International Affairs* (MERIA) notes that the majority of these recruits "were well-educated, particularly in technology and the sciences" (Sept. 1999). EIJ sought recruits not only in private mosques in poor districts but also among members of the presidential guard, civil service, military intelligence, media and academia (MERIA Sept. 1999).

According to the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, EIJ sought to achieve its goal of overthrowing the government by penetrating the military and on 6 October 1981, members of Jihad assassinated President Anwar Sadat, although they never achieved their goal of overthrowing the government (2004, 365). Following Sadat's assassination, a number of EIJ members were executed and hundreds more were arrested, many of whom were characterized as "young, educated and lower to middle class" (*Encyclopedia of Islam* 2004, 365).

EIJ attracted hundreds of recruits in the 1980s and 1990s when it waged a violent campaign against the government of President Hosni Mubarak; however, in December 2007, EIJ leader Sayed Imam announced from his prison cell that his group had renounced violence (Al Arabiya 9 Dec. 2007; see also International Crisis Group 18 June 2008).

According to *Country Reports on Terrorism*, EIJ has "several hundred hard-core members inside and outside Egypt" (US 30 Apr. 2008, Ch. 6). Besides its international activities under the command of Al-Qaeda, EIJ was reportedly dormant within Egypt as of 2007 (ibid.; CFR 30 May 2008a).

### **Other organizations**

Takfir wal-Hijra (Takfir) emerged in the 1970s and focused on recruiting newly urbanized students from poorer southern Egyptian families but, unlike other militant organizations, deliberately enlisted women into its ranks (MERIA Sept. 1999).

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reports that the group responsible for the October 2004 bombings in the Red Sea resort of Taba that killed 34 people was Al Tawhid Wal Jihad, an Islamic militant group established in the northern Sinai town of Al Arish in 2002 by a young dentist named Khaled Mosaed (26 Apr. 2006). Mosaed reportedly recruited some 100 men "whom he organised in separate cells often kept ignorant of each other in order to limit the damage should members fall into the hands of the security services" (BBC 26 Apr. 2006).

Amnesty International (AI) reports that in November 2006, a group of foreign and Egyptian students were arrested, "interrogated and allegedly tortured" for their suspected participation in a "terrorist cell" that was recruiting people in Egypt to fight coalition forces in Iraq (5 Jan. 2007).

A December 2006 article by Agence France-Presse (AFP) notes that Egypt is considered a major point of recruitment for Islamic militant organizations and that a number of terror suspects discovered in Western countries have previously been students in Cairo or Alexandria (21 Dec. 2006).

In January 2008, Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported that police had arrested 11 students, including a Syrian citizen, who were studying at various Egyptian universities (11 Jan. 2008). The Syrian student "allegedly planned 'to recruit students to send them to Iraq and Afghanistan'" (AFP 11 Jan. 2008).

### **Internet as recruitment method**

In June 2007, *Al Ahram Weekly* reported that Egyptian security agents had arrested dozens of suspects belonging to two unnamed extremist groups who were allegedly planning to attack major government installations; the groups had reportedly attracted recruits and promoted their views through the Internet (21-27 June 2007).

At an October 2007 meeting held between Egypt and the European Union (EU) sub-committee on justice and security, Egypt expressed its intention to cooperate with the EU in counter-terrorism measures by highlighting its recent initiative which involves monitoring how the Internet is used as a recruitment tool by militant organizations (EU 3 Apr. 2008, 6).

In July 2008, an Al-Qaeda expert appeared on the Arabic-language television program entitled *Panorama*, which was broadcast by the Dubai-based Al-Arabiya. The expert spoke about the use of the Internet by Al-Qaeda to recruit Egyptians into "individual cells" by providing them with the necessary information, training, and links with up to two other individuals in order to "carry out operations inside Egypt" (Al-Arabiya 30 June 2008).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Four professors specializing in Egyptian politics did not respond to requests for information within the time constraints of this Response.

Attempts to contact the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights were unsuccessful.

**Publications, including:** *Egyptian Politics: The Dynamism of Authoritarian Rule* (Maye Karrem), *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Gille Kepel), *La Terre est plus belle que le paradis* (Khaled al-Berry).

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